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ABSTRACT

Frequently implicit in Canadian social policy addressing other issues, family policy is generally assumed to be a good thing, is bound up with social structure, and, when made explicit, is prescriptive and potentially embarrassing to government. Historically important as a forerunner of more recent income assistance programs, the provision of mothers' allowances for the support of families exemplified government policy focusing on the needs of particular types of family units. Not only were the early government income assistance provisions niggardly, they left prairie residents prey to financial institutions that in effect dispossessed many settlers who had previously been brought to these areas by the Canadian government. Almost without exception, from the early 1900s to the present, measures taken to relieve hardship were inadequate to meet human needs and represented poor stewardship of human capital. Similarly, neither has more recent government provision of family allowances exerted a major impact on family income. It is evident that at no time did Canada move beyond a residual and stigmatizing approach to the needs of families. In its approach to population questions, Canada has neglected its human capital. In this matter, laissez-faire capitalism seems oddly improvident. (RH)

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FAMILY POLICY IN CANADA:

SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Draft version only

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Family Policy in Canada: Some Theoretical Considerations

Interest in the concept of family policy has grown in Canada and the United States during the 1970s. North American commentators have tended to bemoan the lack of a family policy in their countries, and cast envious eyes at countries claiming to have a family policy. Public officials have responded by claiming that though they do not speak of family policy, their social policies are in fact supportive of the family.[1] Thus the idea of explicit or implicit family policy has arisen. It also becomes apparent that family policy is very difficult to define.

What is not usually disputed is that government policies of any kind may have a measurable impact on families whether intended, incidental, or accidental. Fluoridization of water may for example be an official policy, but will not usually be viewed as part of family policy. In fact there is likely to be no lack of policies which have an impact on families. Governments may though be reluctant to relate these policies or their impacts to each other, either because they are frankly contradictory or because their precise effects and interrelationship are unknown.[2] Measurement of impact may itself be a highly political act.

If governments were to spell out the importance of families for, or in, their policies, they would be faced with a number of embarrassing choices. They would have to specify the kind or kinds of family they support or wish to support. Explicit family policies are in other words prescriptive, though not unknown. It is not however surprising if governments prefer lack of specificity. Family and motherhood are reassuring terms so long as they do not have to be defined. The process of definition may again have political consequences.

The term family policy tends to be used normatively; there is an assumption that it is a good thing. In asking whether Canada has or has ever had a family policy, we are concerned not only with the consequences, but also with the extent to which government relates its policies to the social structure.

" . . . the issues involved in family policy are far from being purely technical - they cut to the very heart of our social structure."[3]

Do we know whether government has taken steps to maintain or to change the nature of the social structure? If it has its values may become apparent. The values and the features of a specific policy are important. In the case of family policies, the classic social policy questions apply - who do they benefit and who do they not benefit. While policies have specific effects on families and family units it is their relationship to the social structure which may be most important.

Use of the term 'family' does not automatically make a social policy a discrete family policy. Thus family allowances could just as usefully be called children's allowances, or even mothers' allowances. What is really important is not the name, but rather the nature of the impact of social and economic policies on the family. Broad social, economic and demographic developments influence the family; in fact we can say the family reflects them. We cannot so confidently say that the family itself affects these broad developments.

When we remove the emotional connotations of the term, family, we see it instead as a social institution with functions to perform. Viewed in this way, the decline of the family would mean a reduction or a cessation of its functions, or a transfer of some or all of its functions to other social institutions.

If governments confront the question of the family, they have to decide in what direction the family as a social institution is going, and whether it is changing in ways to be encouraged, arrested, reversed or ignored. The family is an institution subject to change. A family policy might take account of changes, seek to influence them, and even promote them.

Family policy is unavoidably bound up with social structure. Any serious consideration of family policy must determine (a) the role of the family in society, (b) the relationship of the family to other social institutions, (c) the types of social policies which might influence this relationship, and (d) who is or might be responsible for determining family policy.

In a consideration of the family and social structure in Canada we are concerned, because Canada is still a young country, with the transmission of family forms many of them introduced into the country in relatively recent times from other countries. We are concerned with the changes and adaptations over time made by different family types, and the extent to which characteristics have persisted, and new ones have emerged.

In a global sense we are concerned with the rapid rate of population formation in the early years of this century. This growth was the consequence of deliberate government policy. Admission of immigrants is at all times a matter of deliberate political, economic and social policy. Admission criteria may change over time, but at all times they reflect official policy.

In the first fifteen years of this century immigrants were admitted to settle and farm the prairies. Farming background was a more important criterion than country of origin. Later technical and professional skills were sought. Immigration policies have thus helped create a polyglot cosmopolitan population, subject to existing systems of government, law and education.

Given its history official immigration policy has had an impact on the institution of the family in Canada. But the primary objective involved has been population formation and support. In the furtherance of this policy governments may be seen to be promoting the political and economic power of themselves and their supporters.

The family in Canada may indeed reflect the impact of Canadian policies, but changes in size and function correspond to similar changes in other industrialized countries, thus suggesting a sharing of political and economic ideas and conditions. Canada may have made fewer claims to have a family policy than other countries, but similar conditions have prevailed in different countries. Canada has had strong ties with other capitalist economies and shares common values and institutions.

Official policies affecting the family therefore in Canada reflect the social structure and ideology of Canadian society. The family in Canada has adapted to changing social and economic conditions, but there has been little overt support of it as an important social institution.

A Practical Application: How the West Was Not Won!

The basic social institutions of Canada were already in place by the time of confederation. In many respects the next forty years were a consolidation of these institutions rather than a dramatic confirmation or expansion of nationhood. The nation lacked capital and people. Once skeletal rail links were in place between central Canada and British Columbia the opportunity existed to exploit the agricultural potential of the Prairies, but to do this people, preferably farmers, were needed. Massive immigration was the population policy chosen by the federal government.

The growth of the prairie provinces during the first two decades of this century was spectacular but such rapid growth was potentially socially disruptive. The basic infrastructure of government was not yet fully in place. The task of making people of many different nationalities into Canadians sharing common values and outlooks was a major undertaking. The education system was one of the main social agents in this work. But the discipline of the workplace may have had most effect on the adult population. Immigration and land settlement policies brought new Canadians automatically into contact with the government. The cultivating of virgin land and the sale of grain brought new farmers into close contact with the economic system. Years of prosperity and good weather prior to the First World War were followed by drought, rising prices and economic uncertainty. There was a scarcity of labour as adult men and youths enlisted. The world demand for grain grew until 1920 when depression first struck.

The first two decades of the century were times of social turmoil and potential unrest. The war brought political changes. In Manitoba for example a Conservative government in power for 15 years was defeated in 1915 by the Liberal opposition. The new Liberal government ran on a platform of social change, which reflected many of the popular issues of the time. During its first year of office it introduced prohibition, compulsory education, the female franchise, and mothers pensions, and abolished bilingualism.

In these innovations Manitoba was soon followed by other provinces, especially in the West. Prohibition spread across Canada; so did the female franchise. Mothers' pensions were initiated in Saskatchewan in 1917/18, in Alberta in 1919, in Ontario and British Columbia in 1920. Nova Scotia followed suit in 1930.

Mothers' pensions or allowances, as they were soon called, provide an example of a social policy innovation which appears to reflect the social circumstances in which it was born, but which persisted to have long-lasting significance for the development of social policy in Canada. For the purposes of the present discussion mothers' allowances afford an example of government policy focussing on the needs of particular types of family unit.

The introduction of mothers' allowances in Canada followed the first introduction of a similar provision in the State of Illinois in 1911. By 1920 40 American States had introduced this type of legislation, and in 21 of them the program was administered by the Juvenile Court.[4] In the case of Illinois the aid-to-mothers law was an amendment of the juvenile court law passed in 1899 - "Juvenile Courts - Funds to Parents; an act to amend an act entitled 'An Act relating to children who are now or may hereafter become dependent, neglected, or delinquent, to define these terms, and to provide for the treatment, control, maintenance, adoption, and guardianship of the persons of such children."

The American precedents for the Canadian mothers' allowances legislation thus place it in the context of child protection legislation generally. They indicate state intervention in an area previously reserved for charity, and in fact opposition to mothers' allowances came from the charitable sector in the United States. It is perhaps worth noting that the absence of a well developed system of charitable agencies in the prairie provinces may have been one factor in the early introduction of mothers' allowances in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

The other major circumstance of relevance to the introduction of mothers allowances was the First World War which served to heighten, if not exacerbate a number of social issues. There was a dramatic rise in the cost of living.

The index stood at 100 in 1913, 124 in 1916, 162 in 1918 and 190 in 1920. The high cost of living and the great demand for labour led to children aged 13 to 16 years being withdrawn from school before the normal time. At the same time large numbers of 17 and 18 year old youths enlisted in the army. Women's participation in the labour force also rose.[5]

The war served to throw light on a number of social conditions not previously acknowledged. The working conditions of women and children came under scrutiny. Just over half of the 360,000 men aged 20-34 years medically examined under the Military Service Act of 1917 were more or less physically unfit.[6] Tuberculosis was a big problem during mobilization, and this disease as well as a variety of psychiatric illnesses during the demobilization process made it difficult to reintegrate servicemen into the labour force.

Social legislation in direct response to the war started in 1915 with pensions being provided for wounded and incapacitated soldiers and for their widows and children and their widowed mothers. The full impact of death and injury alone was considerable, with some 56,600 dead and 150,000 wounded soldiers. By March 1919 66,800 war pensions had been awarded, and of these 16,500 went to dependents. By March 1921 these numbers had grown to 118,000 and 23,000 respectively. A variety of other social measures were introduced for the reestablishment of discharged soldiers. In November 1918 Canada was faced with the reabsorption of 350,000 men into industry.[7] During this process relief in cash (in 1919/20) and in kind (1920/21) were provided through the Canadian Patriotic Fund.

Mothers' allowances were thus introduced in Canada during years of acute social and economic turmoil. In most provinces they followed the earlier introduction of child protection legislation. They were in this respect designed to prevent the separation of children from their families due to reasons of poverty. They were in all cases predicated, and in fact calculated, on the number of children in a family. However no set rate of allowances was given in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, "the aim of payments being as far as possible to make up the difference between the income and the ordinary expenditure of a family."[8] In Ontario the rates were lower in towns than in cities and lower again in villages and rural areas, and limited to $5.00 per month per child in families of more than 5 children. In British Columbia deductions could be made where a beneficiary owned her own home or lived rent free.

Prior to the introduction of the Ontario Mothers' Allowance Act in 1920, a committee of enquiry established that there were 16,048 widows with 31,223 children in the province, of whom 7,500 widows with 22,289 might be eligible for an allowance. Labour representatives urged that deserted, divorced and unmarried mothers should be included in the provisions of the legislation, but instead the regulations specified that the father must have been a British subject and the mother a British subject before marriage, and there should be two or more children under the age of 14. Not until 1933 did the number of families in receipt of mothers' allowances in Ontario exceed 7,500. At its introduction the Ontario measure was seen as a piece of labour legislation.[9]

In British Columbia, also, a commission after holding a number of public hearings recommended that divorced and unmarried mothers should be included in the provisions of the 1920 Mothers Pension Act; again they were excluded. Nevertheless applications for the new pension were said to be pouring in within months of the legislation being passed.[10]

The confusion of aims surrounding the new mothers' allowances program is nicely illustrated in the Canada Year Book 1925 which contains the following unattributed quotations.

" . . . it is not desired that applicants be considered as applying for charity; but that the mother be regarded as an employee of the State, receiving remuneration for services rendered in the proper care of her children. The mother, as an employee of the Government, must not only satisfy them of her fitness to receive an allowance, but also that she is fulfilling the trust which is being placed in her."[11]

We see then three views of mothers allowances (1) a child protection measure (2) a (protection of) labour measure and (3) mothers as employees of the state - the allowances being perhaps best described as a social wage. Yet the allowances never seem to have been designed or intended except possibly in British Columbia to provide an adequate level of income notwithstanding the requirement of two children (usually under the age of 16) or an incapacitated husband and at least one child. In addition there were strict residence requirements and the required status of a British subject.

The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs for 1916 catches something of the conflicting forces surrounding the role of women. The "exalted duties of motherhood" identified by Cardinal Gibbons[12] can be contrasted with the evangelical fervour of a Nellie McClung.

"Despite the war, really helped by the war, the work of Woman Suffrage advocates went on in 1916 and triumphed in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Its influence, in a war connection, was very like that of Prohibition among the men - confusing the issue, distributing energies, dividing counsels. Women like Mrs. Nellie McChung were labouring earnestly for a vote when their force and eloquence could have done much to aid recruiting. The work of women in the war which proved their capacity aided the women who were agitating for the suffrage; the combined forces won much success."[13] Masculine reservations about both the cause of women and the cause of prohibition are of course discernible in this quotation. What is perhaps portended though is the idea that the times were exceptional, and that were it not for the war women would not have got the vote. The rapidity with which Canada first went dry under the prohibition laws and then went wet under the liquor control laws, all in the space of a dozen years, may suggest something of a paradigm for the mothers' allowances legislation, which while it was not rescinded, was so tightly regulated, that concepts of child protection or a social wage were lost to sight.[14]

The rapid growth of population of the prairie provinces has been alluded to above. Whereas Canada's population grew by 34.2 per cent between 1901 and 1911, Saskatchewan grew by 439.5 per cent. In the period 1911 - 1916, Manitoba's population grew by 20.0 per cent, Saskatchewan's by 31.5 per cent, and Alberta's by 32.5 per cent. The first two or three decades of the twentieth century therefore saw rapid population formation on the prairies. The populations of these prairie provinces reflected this rapid formation. In 1916 less than half of Alberta's population had been born in Canada; in Saskatchewan the proportion was 54 per cent and in Manitoba 60 per cent. The 1916 Census of the Prairie Provinces explained the excess of married males over married females in terms of the "relatively large proportion of immigrants comprised in the population."[15] But this sex difference for married and unmarried persisted for several decades and went beyond what might be viewed as an ordinary demographic occurrence. The difference

was visible in the excess of men over women drawing old age pensions for the first time in the late 1920s. In the 15-44 year age group in Saskatchewan men exceeded women by 45.3 thousand in 1921, 39.4 thousand in 1931, and 17.6 thousand in 1941. It is against this background of relatively good odds for marriage or remarriage that perhaps the proportion of widows potentially eligible for mothers' allowances may be viewed.

In the decade 1911-21 when the number of widows might have been expected to rise at a higher rate than that of widowers due to war deaths, in fact widowers grew at a higher rate than widows. But for both categories the rate was considerably above that for the period 1901-1911 or for 1921-31.

In Saskatchewan the sex difference was reversed. There were 90.2 per cent more widows in 1921 than in 1911, and 73.8 per cent more widowers. These rates of increase were substantially more than for Canada as a whole. The rates of increase were considerably lower for the period 1921-31, but there were still proportionately more widows than widowers, and this difference grew more pronounced in the period 1931-41.

The proportion of widowers and widows in the total population gradually rose in the period 1871-1901, but then fell by 1911, and resumed its rise in subsequent decades. The influx of immigrants during the period 1901-1914 appears to have been responsible for temporarily reversing what in large measure was a gradual aging process in the Canadian population as a whole. (See Table 5).

If we keep in mind the eligibility requirement in Saskatchewan and elsewhere for mothers' allowance, i.e. children under 16, (under 14 in Ontario) then by and large widows under the age of 65 would be eligible to apply if their lack of income so warranted. Widows under 65 years represented 67.9 per cent of all widows in 1911, 66.6 per cent in 1921, 57.5 per cent in 1931, and 53.1 per cent in 1941. (See Table 1). An aging process in the general population and the growing life expectancy of women would seem to explain this decline in the proportion of younger widows. However remarriage was obviously a factor also in reducing the number of younger widows.

If we recapitulate at this point we see that the prairie provinces were rapidly settled in the late 19th and early twentieth century as a result of deliberate government policy. Canada as a whole was at the same time extremely susceptible to world conditions, and in seeking to meet a growing world demand for grain before and during the First World War suffered the consequences of a fall in grain prices after the war. The 1920s were then difficult years economically, but were followed by a decade of almost unrelieved depression. The new population on the prairies like the flotsam on the tide were left stranded. The government measures taken to relieve hardship, of which mothers' allowances was one of the earliest and most long-lasting programs, were inadequate to meet the human need, and represented poor stewardship of human capital. In this equation population formation on the prairies is seen as the equivalent to capital formation in other economic and industrial contexts. Not only were government measures niggardly, they left prairie residents a prey to financial institutions, who in effect dispossessed many settlers, who had previously been brought to the prairies by the Canadian Government.[16] The history of mothers' allowances is important because they led to the income assistance programmes of the period after the Second World War. Many of the values that underlay the administration of mothers' allowances have persisted in our modern programmes.

It is extremely difficult to get any satisfactory measure of adequacy for mothers' allowances, since with the possible exception of British Columbia as mentioned above no province made any attempt to provide a basic subsistence income to recipient families through these programs. There were in fact substantial differences in the rates paid in different provinces. (See Table 2). There are a number of indices of wholesale prices, of rates of wages, of average yearly earnings, and of the cost of living which cover the period from the First World War to the Second World War, and against which the amounts paid for mothers' allowances may be measured. These indices all show the period of rapid inflation during the First World War and until 1920, and then the sharp fall in 1921 towards a lower but relatively stable level until 1930, the subsequent sharp fall until the mid 1930s and the slow rise in the late 1930s.

Average wage levels provide perhaps the best tangible indicator by which to judge the adequacy of mothers' allowance payments. One measure of continuing poverty might for example be if these allowances fall below 50 per cent of the average wage level. It is true that recipients might have other sources of income, but the intention in most provinces never seems to have been related to total sufficiency of income. One exception may have been Manitoba about which Saskatchewan's Commissioner of Child Protection made the following wistful comment in his 1935/36 Annual Report.

"The ideal system would seem to be along the lines in operation in Manitoba, where they have what is called the budget system. There the cost of living for the family is worked out, any income deducted, and an allowance is granted for the balance. Thus it is attempted to give a widow an amount adequate to support her according to the cost of living rates worked out by the Dominion Department of Labour. By this system, of course, the widow herself obtains something for her own needs. In that respect it goes beyond a child welfare allowance. We do not pay any allowance for the mother, but a fixed allowance for children."[17]

It is likely therefore that the average wage level was rarely approached by most recipients of mothers' allowances. (See Table 3). The rates paid and the regulations used were constraints which limited the capacity of mothers' allowances to move beyond the level and the role of relief payments. Yet even though they might have needed the extra help of relief, many recipients of mothers' allowances preferred to make do with what they had got.

"Notwithstanding the very careful administration of this part of the child welfare work, the amount paid for the year increased a little over ten thousand dollars. While there are those who think our scale of allowances is fairly low, the recipients themselves seem to invariably prefer the allowance to ordinary relief. In the cities some of the recipients obtain partial relief in addition to the allowance and are given a small exemption on the allowance so that they are better off financially than if they depended upon the relief allowance alone."[18]

As the depression deepened and savings were used up the number of applicants for the mothers' allowance increased. Older children were not eligible, but with no jobs available were often also dependent on the limited family income derived partly or wholly from mothers' allowances. (See Table 4).

In the period 1931-1941 more women sought paid employment, and their participation in the labour force increased proportionately. In Saskatchewan this represented an increase of 5,000 women workers from 37,500 to 42,800.[19] This increase in paid work by women may have offset some of the problems of poverty, but its contribution is likely to have been marginal due to the low pay attaching to jobs for women.

The straitjacket in which mothers' allowances operated may be illustrated by the small increase in expenditures during the 1930s compared with the dramatic growth of relief expenditures. (See Table 6). This growth was made possible in part by federal relief legislation introduced in 1930, and reintroduced on an annual basis until March, 1941 when federal contributions to the provinces were discontinued. At this point the cost of mothers' allowances again exceeded that of relief payments as they had done in the 1920s. Mothers' allowance programmes continued during and after the Second World War. Quebec introduced its mothers' allowances programme in 1939, New Brunswick in 1944, and Newfoundland in 1951.

Thus a social program introduced during the special circumstances of the First World War was adopted by all provinces except Prince Edward Island. Mothers' allowances were of undoubted value to recipients during the worst days of the depression, but were never expanded so as to assume the major role of social support which might have been possible. Federal contributions for relief could have been diverted into a program of family and individual support payments. Instead federal relief legislation was reintroduced annually during the 1930s. Federal contributions were seen as exceptional by both the federal and provincial governments.

The role of the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare (later the Canadian Welfare Council) under its Executive Director, Charlottee Whitton, bears close examination for its attitude towards relief and mothers' allowances. The restricted role of the program was obviously approved.

"At the present time over $15,200,000 per annum is being expended for the care of 14,000 mothers and 40,000 children under this legislation. It is one of the measures, however, in which sound and safe principles of administration and extension are endangered through uninformed popular demand for its application to groups, who would be more effectively served by other and different measures of social aid."[20]

A few years later however the Canadian Welfare Council was reporting the field of social assistance to be "in such a formative condition as to border upon chaos in many communities and even provinces in the Dominion today. This is a condition which has been inexpressibly aggravated by the large scale provision of public unemployment relief since 1930 - but the problem antedates this development."[21]

The degree of organizational confusion in the country is reflected by the contradictory statements appearing in the Canadian Welfare Council's reports. The 1935 Annual Report recognized the similarity of principle in different assistance programmes.

"Surely progress to national well-being in our social assistance involves recognition of the fact that <u>these three major forms of social relief</u> (italic in original), - direct unemployment relief, old age allowances, and mothers' allowances - are all closely related in principle, all charges against the community; all susceptible to the same humane considerations in plan and administration; all, logically, primarily the concern of the unit of government constitutionally responsible for their effective provision, and that is the provincial."[22]

Such humane considerations did not prevent the staff of the Council undertaking "a complete inquiry" into the system and administration of mothers allowances in British Columbia at the request of the government during 1931, which effectively led to a sharp reduction in the previously relatively generous rates of mothers' allowances in the province. From 1933 municipalities assumed a share of the cost, and overall expenditures fell. The province resumed full responsibility in 1938, and expenditures rose. "British Columbia's expenditures and provisions were long regarded as difficult to justify from the point of view of the actual need of many of the beneficiaries as well as from that of the province's resources. Marked adjustments, inevitably unpopular, have followed on the adoption of reorganization, suggested by the Council, by British Columbia in the past year."[23]

The council felt that the mothers' allowances programs in the six provinces that had them during the early 1930s "have stood up very effectively under a strain of unanticipated severity."[24] At the same time four of the six, the far western provinces, had reduced their rates of payment.

" . . . with least hardship in Manitoba, where the budget and schedule system always in force has allowed automatic adjustments with the downward movement in the cost of living. In Saskatchewan the allowance has always differed from that of the other provinces in that it has been a grant in aid only, and further reductions in the past year have created a situation in which the great number of the beneficiaries quite obviously require supplementary relief from other sources."[25]

In fact despite its lower rates of payment, Saskatchewan was serving twice as many families and children as Manitoba throughout the 1930s. Although there is every indication from Saskatchewan Bureau of Child Protection annual reports that mothers' allowances were tightly administered, Manitoba's budget system may have proved to be a more effective rationing mechanism.

The sanguine views of the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare were not shared by the authors forming the Research Committee of the League for Social Reconstruction. Viewing the period immediately prior to the depression, they came to the conclusion in their 1935 report that "a majority of Canadian families were, in the year 1930, and from all indications in the year 1929, living below the bare standard of decent livelihood."[26]

These authors calculated that an income of between $1,200 and $1,500 was needed to afford a "minimum standard of decency." They recommended

"The present provincial systems of mothers' pensions should be superseded by a national scheme of widows' and orphans' insurance, under which the widow or dependent child of an insured worker would be entitled to pensions irrespective of their means."[27]

Marsh, writing in 1943, noted the wide disparity in the rates of mothers' allowance payments, and contrasted them unfavourably with the allowances paid to the family of a soldier through the Dependents' Allowance Board, which of course had had their genesis at the same time as the first provincial mothers' allowance schemes during the First World War.[28]

Marsh saw children's allowances as a partial remedy for some of the problems raised by family poverty. He pointed out that after the implementation of the United States Social Security Act in 1935, the structure of mothers' allowance programs soon began to disappear.[29] However no such radical change was to occur in Canada. Family allowances, when finally introduced, again did not address directly the question of income adequacy. The implementation of family allowances in 1945 provides a logical termination to this discussion of what constituted a first essay by government in the area of family policy. Mothers' allowances were continued during the post-war period, and were effectively merged with other social assistance programs by the time the Canada Assistance Plan was implemented in 1966. Many of the principles of administration though have remained the same. Other categorical programs such as those for the old, the blind and the disabled might raise similar questions. We are now in an era when universality in social programs is under attack. Past experience of selectivity in the form of categorical programs does not provide any assurance that the poor and disadvantaged actually benefit from programs specifically targetted towards them. Selectivity may be viewed rather as a rationing device, pure and simple.

If the thesis can be maintained that mothers' allowances were the true precursor and even progenitor of present day social assistance programs, it is likely that official attitudes towards the family have remained the same. Family allowances introduced under similar wartime influences to the first mothers' allowance programs, have never been developed in such a way as to have a major impact on family income. Even with a substantial increase in 1974, total family allowance expenditures were only restored to the proportion of the Gross National Product prevailing twenty years earlier.[30]

What we have had since the First World War is a major sub-stratum of families dependent on means/needs/income tested programs. The mothers' allowances programs provide the evidence that the core of welfare recipients have always been women with children and/or incapacitated husbands. These programs have always been stringently administered. Stigma has always attached to recipients of benefits. There is little evidence of entitlement or a social wage. When attempts have been made to mitigate the consequences of unemployment, the same criticism has been directed against unemployment insurance as against social assistance.

What has been achieved by mothers' allowance programs and their successors? The programs provided financial help on a systematic basis to specific categories of poor people. Their adequacy varied but in no cases did programs approach average earned income levels. They did not therefore eliminate poverty; they mitigated some of its worst effects. They did not in any real sense reduce material inequality in Canada. They were in some respects a consequence of economic and related population growth. The amounts spent on relief and mothers' allowances were not a major stimulus to economic activity.

The administration of mothers' allowance programs contributed in a major way to the development of provincial and some municipal social service departments. Tight control on the programs prevented a major response being made to the poverty caused by the depression. But mothers' allowances were not discontinued even when relief programs were at their most important during the depression. The mothers' allowance programs may themselves have been a way of regulating demand for relief; they always met part of the financial need of eligible families, and this may have been enough even in Saskatchewan, the lowest paying of the provinces, to deter recipients from applying for relief.

The ideological supports for the original mothers' allowance programs, particularly the women's suffrage movement, quickly disappeared after women gained the vote, and after women's role, so important, during the First World War, was reduced in peace-time conditions. Even so support for widows did not extend to unmarried mothers, the divorced and the separated.

Mothers'allowances were however seen as a way of preventing some children coming into care. The distinction made between poverty and neglect was not always sustainable. The annual report of the Toronto Children's Aid Society for 1930/31 discussed the problem of increased referrals caused by worsening economic conditions.

"The Society strenuously refuses to have children made wards because of poverty alone, but it is quite apparent that the demoralizing effects of unemployment and underemployment create or aggravate ills which in turn require the major operations."[31]

The report went on to complain of the lack of resources experienced by family agencies in the past. The economic crisis had paradoxically brought some relief of the problem.

"The increase in staff of civic welfare departments in different cities and the placing at their disposal and at that of the private agencies of more funds for family relief have made possible the economy of considerable expenditures on such families in which neglect problems exist, in order to avoid, if possible, the necessity of the Society removing the children from the home."[33]

What was possible in large cities was not so possible in rural provinces like Saskatchewan. Lack of staff and resources appears responsible for the number of children in care falling by half between 1925 and 1935, and this at a time when the child population of the province reached a peak in 1931. The number of children admitted to care who lacked one parent fell dramatically from 649 (359 father living, 290 mother living) in 1927 to 172 (90 father living, 82 mother living) in 1936/37. The number of illegitimate children admitted to care reached a peak in 1930/31 and then declined until 1938/39. Fewer orphans also were admitted to care during the same period. An active policy of resisting referrals was enunciated.

"We try to differentiate between poverty and neglect and hold responsible local communities to adjust matters if possible . . . we are still being approached by the uninformed to take children into "the home" . . . we, like all child caring agencies working up to the approved standards, avoid falling into the error of trying to assist children in their own homes or relieving parents of their responsibility for sentimental reasons. We must be hard-headed as to why we do it."[33]

The major role of mothers' allowances in keeping families together was readily acknowledged in the Saskatchewan Commissioner of Child Welfare's Annual Report for 1930/31. The inability to help widowed fathers in a similar way was deplored. The policy of local community responsibility for poor families was also proving more difficult to sustain.[34]

Social commentators of the 1920s and 1930s recognized that the state was assuming new and far-reaching responsibilities. Writing in 1935 Charlotte Whitton recognized the "tremendous future significance" of the federal government's offer of relief to municipal authorities in late 1920. Such relief was given for the next four years and again in 1926/27.[35] This federal precedent was of course followed by the same type of action throughout the 1930s. Whitton also felt that there was "a quite definite movement towards complete assumption by the public authority of responsibility for all the families for whom it is providing material relief, and a similar assumption of liability for complete care by the private agency for the obviously much smaller group for whom it will care."[36]

The idea of public responsibility for disadvantaged people was therefore seen as being new, perhaps radical, but not unacceptable. Mothers' allowances were explained as follows in Saskatchewan in 1935/36.

"Ever since the public has assumed responsibility for dependent children there has always been a demand for assistance to widows left without means of support."[37]

Conclusion

Radical ideas need radical support if they are to become major social programs. Child welfare and mothers' allowances were never amalgamated into a major program of family support. Canada did not move beyond a residual and stigmatizing approach to the needs of families. A country willing to accept

millions of immigrants did not make adequate efforts to care for them when they were settling the prairie provinces and elsewhere. Whitton writing in the 1930s noted the perennial problem of immigrants re-emigrating. This problem has persisted in the decades since the Second World War. In its approach to population questions Canada has neglected its human capital. Laisser-faire capitalism seems oddly improvident.

TABLE 1

No. of widowed mothers in Saskatchewan aged 15-64 years in 1921, 1931 and 1941.

	No. of widows aged 15 - 64	Percentage of all widows in province	No. of widows in receipt of mothers' allowance	Recipient widows as % of all widows in Sask.	No. of families in receipt
1911	3773	67.9	-	-	-
1921	7036	66.6	475	-	522
1931	8486	57.5	1675	19.7	2341
1941	10071	53.1	1903	18.9	2836

Source: Census of Canada 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941, Canada Year Book 1938 and 1941, and Saskatchewan Annual Report of the Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children, 1921.

TABLE 2

A Comparison of Average Yearly Earnings and Mothers' Allowance Payments in 1921, 1926, 1931, 1936 and 1941

Average Yearly Earnings. Average annual amount of mothers' allowance paid per family.

		Nova Scotia	Ontario	Manitoba	Sask.	Alberta	B.C.
	$	$	$	$	$	$	$
1921	996	-	291.23	674.75	-	359.21	-
1926	999	-	359.90	487.54	290.76	346.51	525.83
1931	950	301.55	360.75	446.97	175.85	319.95	520.58
1936	896	297.86	356.45	390.26	163.87	248.17	415.15
1941	1220	342.58	431.58	429.53	160.11	275.53*	470.30

*Fiscal year 1940/41
Source: Canada Year Book 1938, 1939, 1942 and 1954.

TABLE 3

Average annual amount of mothers' allowance paid as percentage of national average yearly earnings in 1921, 1926, 1931, 1936 and 1941.

	Nova Scotia	Ontario	Manitoba	Sask.	Alberta	B.C.
1921	-	29.2	67.7	-	36.1	-
1926	-	36.0	48.8	29.1	34.7	52.6
1931	31.7	38.0	47.0	18.5	33.7	54.8
1936	33.1	39.8	43.6	18.3	27.7	46.3
1941	28.1	35.7	35.2	13.1	22.6	38.5

Source: Canada Year Book 1938, 1939, 1942 and 1954.

TABLE 4

The Average Number of Eligible Children in Families receiving Mothers' Allowances in 1921, 1931 and 1941.

	Sask.	Alberta	Manitoba	Ontario	B.C.	Nova Scotia
1921	n/a	2.9	n/a	3.1	n/a	-
1931	2.8	2.5	3.2	2.9	2.1	3.1
1941	2.6	2.0	3.0	1.9	2.0	2.5

Source: Canada Year Book 1938 and 1942.

TABLE 5

The Number of Widowed Persons in Canada as a percentage of the total population in 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931 and 1941.

	Widowers Number	Percentage	Widows Number	Percentage
1871	37487	1.08	79895	2.29
1881	50895	1.18	109435	2.53
1891	62777	1.30	129015	2.67
1901	73837	1.37	151181	2.81
1911	89121	1.23	179598	2.49
1921	119708	1.36	236522	2.69
1931	148954	1.44	288641	2.78
1941	170743	1.48	354378	3.08

Source: Census of Canada (various dates).

TABLE 6

Relief Expenditures and Mothers'Allowances Payments (millions).

	Relief Provinces	Municipalities	Total	Mothers Allowances
1929	1	-	1	5
1930	3	1	4	5
1931	21	5	26	5
1932	38	12	50	5
1933	57	17	74	5
1934	82	22	104	5
1935	79	21	100	6
1936	71	20	91	7
1937	70	13	83	8
1938	58	14	72	9
1939	57	10	67	10
1940	30	6	36	10
1941	15	3	18	9
1942	7	1	8	9

Source: M.C. Urquhart (ed.) Historical Statistics of Canada Cambridge: At the University Press, Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited 1965, p. 93.

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